

Abstract Title Page
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Title: Building a Common Research Agenda Across Jurisdictions

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Abstract Body

Limit 4 pages single-spaced.

Background / Context:

Description of prior research and its intellectual context.

In an effort to bring more knowledge about “what works” to educational practitioners, the Institute of Education Sciences (IES) has made significant investments in developing and disseminating focused, rigorous research projects in order to increase the supply of and demand for this research in educational decision making (Honig & Coburn, 2007). These efforts built on decades of earlier work by the U.S. Department of Education. Despite this investment, practitioners and policymakers continue to make little use of research findings to drive state, district, school, and classroom decision making (Burkhardt & Schonfeld, 2003; Fusarelli, 2008; Lagemann, 2002). Increasingly, education researchers are voicing concern over the structural division between researchers and practitioners and are looking for new ways to integrate practitioners into the research process (Bryk & Gomez, 2008; Bryk, Gomez, & Grunow, 2010; Burkhardt & Schoenfeld, 2003; Coburn & Stein, 2010; Donovan, Wigdor & Snow, 2003; Hiebert, Gallimore, & Stigler, 2002).

Proponents of emerging models of collaborative research argue that involving practitioners in the research process has multiple benefits. First, including practitioners on a research team bridges the divide between research and practice, resulting in a greater likelihood that research findings will be applied to practice (Coburn & Stein, 2010; Roderick, Easton, & Sebring, 2009). Second, practitioner involvement in research can build capacity to incorporate systematic inquiry into regular decision-making processes within practitioner communities (Bryk, Sebring, Allensworth, Luppescu, & Easton, 2010; Roderick, Easton, & Sebring, 2009). Finally, collaborative research can inform the research process by bringing together experts from diverse perspectives to engage in problem-solving work so that research and practice become part of an interactive cycle that supports improvement (Bryk & Gomez, 2008; Bryk, Gomez, & Grunow, 2010).

Ongoing collaborative research efforts provide several lessons to guide this developing field. Researchers involved in university-district partnerships argue that relationships must be attended to at every stage of the process (Clifford & Millar, 2008; Wentworth & Khanna, 2011; Roderick, Easton, & Sebring, 2009; Donovan, Wigdor & Snow, 2003). To accomplish this, many of these collaborations have established formalized roles and routines that designate practitioners as advisors to research studies and provide for monthly review and feedback sessions. These routines allow for changes and additions to the studies based on feedback, a more thorough understanding by all involved parties of the research and research process, and the elimination of sudden unveilings of controversial findings at the end of a study.

Against this backdrop, IES has developed a new scope of work and awarded contracts in January for its ten Regional Educational Laboratories (RELs). The RELs are now required to engage in long-term research alliances with states, districts, and jurisdictions around a coherent research agenda. While there is significant overlap among RELs in the content areas identified as priorities for their alliances, the RELs have adopted a variety of models for research alliances -- multi-district, multi-state, single jurisdiction, and cross-level (state and district combined). In addition, each REL contractor has developed structures and workplans that are designed to increase opportunities for stakeholder collaboration in the research process while also maintaining high quality research practices.

Purpose / Objective / Research Question / Focus of Study:

Description of the focus of the research.

The proposed panel will discuss the work of three RELs under the new contract. Each REL will provide a short overview of their alliances and the first year of work underway. The moderator will then pose a series of questions for the RELs to address that will help surface differences in structures and processes between RELs and alliances; the evolution of the role of the researcher in these contexts as facilitator and instructor as well as researcher; and lessons emerging about how to build alliances.

Moderator questions include:

1. Compare and contrast alliances in your region that are newly formed to those that existed prior to this contract. Are there differences in the type of work underway? Do they require different roles for the REL?
2. What are the benefits and challenges of different alliance models (single jurisdiction, multi-jurisdiction, cross-role)? How was the alliance model determined?
3. How have you negotiated a research agenda with each alliance?
4. What structures do you employ to produce relevant and useful research and build research capacity among districts and states to use work produced by the alliance?
5. How is the role of the researcher different under alliance work?
6. What constraints do you face in conducting research with practitioners in these alliances?

The discussant will react to the panelist presentations and responses to moderator questions, reflect on the work underway and possible future directions, and talk about the implications of this work for research partnerships outside the REL system. The audience will have an opportunity to react to presentations and pose questions during a question and answer period after the discussant.

Setting:

Description of the research location.

(May not be applicable for research methods or panel submissions)

The three RELs on this panel cover a wide range of jurisdictions. REL Northeast and Islands serves a geographically large and demographically diverse region that includes more than 5.3 million students, 11,000 schools, and 2,600 districts across New England, New York, Puerto Rico, and the US Virgin Islands. The region encompasses many small rural districts and some of the largest urban districts in the country. New York, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, and Connecticut are heavily populated and industrialized with many large, medium, and small cities. New Hampshire, Maine, and Vermont are primarily rural with isolated school systems, many of which are in economically distressed communities. Puerto Rico is one large school district serving more than 500,000 students, most of whom have limited English proficiency. The US Virgin Islands, by contrast, has fewer than 16,000 students. Both islands are accountable to the federal education mandates of No Child Left Behind but receive levels of funding and support different from those that states receive.

REL Pacific serves one of the most geographically and culturally varied regions. The Pacific

region is comprised of American Samoa, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI); the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM)—Chuuk, Kosrae, Pohnpei, and Yap; Guam; Hawai'i; the Republic of the Marshall Islands; and the Republic of Palau. The state of Hawai'i is 2,400 miles away from the western coast of the continental United States while other island entities are considerably farther from North America and distant from each other. The region is home to 1,680,000 people, spread across six time zones and the International Date Line, speaking more than twenty distinct languages, and from many culture traditions.

Geographically defined by four of the Great Lakes and the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers, REL Midwest's seven-state region comprises 10 percent of the nation's land mass and is home to more than 54.8 million people—almost 18 percent of the nation's population. Nearly 552,000 teachers serve approximately 8.8 million students in some 20,000 schools.

According to 2010 U.S. Census data, Illinois, Michigan, and Ohio are among the 10 most populous states in the country. Iowa (ranked 30th) is the only Midwest region state not in the top 25 in population. Although the Midwest's student body is slightly more urban than rural, the region contains some of the nation's most rural stretches, located in the farm belts of western Minnesota and Iowa as well as the Appalachian region of southeast Ohio and Michigan's Upper Peninsula.

Intervention / Program / Practice:

Description of the intervention, program, or practice, including details of administration and duration.

RELs provide a wide range of support and research services to alliances. Technical assistance projects include workshops on data use and the research process, data analysis, catalog and gap analysis, protocol and survey development, and data structure and governance plans. Research conducted under the REL program includes descriptive studies, correlational analyses, systematic literature reviews, and randomized control trials. Under the new contract, each REL identified 3-5 priority areas as a focus of their work. Research alliances must be organized in one of these priority areas. The RELs are expected to advance the field of research in these priority areas while engaging in a coherent line of research projects for each alliance.

REL Northeast and Islands has identified four education issues that are addressed in eight research alliances: (1) Identifying and retaining effective teachers and principals; (2) Improving low-performing schools and districts; (3) Ensuring educational equity and supporting special populations; (4) Increasing college and career readiness, access, and completion.

REL Pacific's prevailing regional needs and challenges include three overarching areas for 6 alliances: (1) strengthening teacher effectiveness, (2) engaging families and communities in education, and (3) ensuring career and college readiness. Optimizing data readiness among stakeholders is a dominant need across these three areas.

The Midwest's four priority areas are (1) college and career readiness, (2) early childhood education, (3) educator effectiveness, and (4) low-performing schools and school improvement. These priority areas are foundational to REL Midwest's 10 research alliances.

Appendices

Not included in page count.

Appendix A. References

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